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ABSTRACT

Many adult poor readers do not organize what they read in a way that best facilitates good comprehension. To help students overcome this problem, the Adult Day and Evening School in Oakland, California, organized a reading laboratory for their mostly low-income, educationally disadvantaged students with a diverse range of needs. Instruction in the reading laboratory was for the most part on an individualized basis. Materials were chosen which provided for instruction, practice, reinforcement, and application, particularly of the comprehension and organizational skills which these adult students lacked. Materials also were chosen to permit entry at the level of need, and to provide for a correlated multimedia approach to allow for different learning styles. Results from the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, Forms D and E, administered throughout a 1-year period showed an average 1.35 grade level gain, with students enrolled for 8 weeks; it was felt that student attitudes and motivation improved. Implications for teaching include the following: (1) a well-organized program of instruction can be of benefit to adult students, particularly when dealing with comprehension and critical reading skills; (2) a component which helps students to see the author's organization and emphasizes the important features is especially helpful; and (3) the reading laboratory approach lets students experience success, sometimes for the first time in an academic setting. (KC)

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Oakland Adult Reading Lab

Building Comprehension in Adult Education Students

By Suzanne Johnston

Introduction

By the time individuals become adult education students, they may have learned to identify words and know the meaning of individual words, but have difficulty integrating the separate meanings together and interpreting and evaluating the content of what is read in terms of their purposes and experiences. Many poor adult readers do not organize what they read in a way that best facilitates good comprehension. Reading involves a thinking and organizing process. Reading critically and seeing the author's information as organized units of thought are thinking skills which can help students make more sense of what they are reading. It would seem that some of the difference between good and poor readers is attributable to the way in which they organize what they read. A poor reader may not see reading material as being organized in any way, and give

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equal importance to all sentences and ideas expressed. A good reader, on the other hand, may understand and look for the author's organization, and give emphasis to the main idea, over details which support that main idea. A possible solution then, to the problem of poor comprehension, is to teach poor readers organizational techniques.

During the 1978 school year, the Adult Day and Evening School in Oakland, California, found itself with a problem. A steadily rising number of students at that school needed reading instruction before they could successfully complete the classes needed to earn a high school diploma. Test results showed that a large percentage of the students were severely deficient in reading skills, particularly in the area of reading comprehension. They seemed to lack the skills required to organize what they read in a way that would facilitate comprehension. Content area teachers reported that

the students were unable to see any organization to the material they were reading, thus making comprehension very difficult, if not impossible.

Review of the Literature

A review of the literature showed that Cromer 1970, in considering the student who knows the meaning of individual words, but has difficulty integrating the separate meanings into an organized whole, concluded that much of the difference between good readers and poor readers is attributable to the way in which they respectively input what they read.

In four separate studies, Levin 1971, 1972, 1973, 1973, studied children who were in need of an organizational framework as a reasonable strategy. Like Cromer, he considered the child who possessed the necessary skills, but experienced comprehension problems. He dealt with the technique of using visual imagery as an organizational tool, particularly for those students with an adequate vocabulary. He

felt that there was merit in using this as an organizational tool for comprehension.

It seemed that the problem had been identified, and that an approach to reading comprehension which helped the student to see the organization of what is being read might be helpful.

Student Population

The Adult Day and Evening School is located in an economically disadvantaged area of East Oakland. The students' families are largely low-income. Twenty-five percent of the students in the high school program are receiving financial assistance to attend school.

The student population is very unstable in terms of attendance. Less than forty-one percent of the students who enroll in classes attend class enough to earn high school credit. Student ages range from sixteen years upward, with a large fraction of the student body enrolling in high school subject classes being under twenty-one years of age.

Educational goals are varied. Some students attend adult education classes to learn basic reading skills. Others enroll to brush up on skills necessary for a job. Some are hoping to pass the GED Test(high school equivalency) and others want to earn their high school diploma. Some enroll to qualify for financial aid. Some are recent high school drop-outs. Some have not been in school for years. Some have almost no schooling, while others have a high school diploma. Some students have a high degree of motivation and make rapid progress, while others have almost no commitment to self-improvement.

The adult education program is often the last hope for a student with a reading problem. Many are embarrassed, insecure, and extremely sensitive. Some are angry at being in the program. Others are frustrated by their life situations. All have different learning styles and capacities which must be met with respect and sensitivity.

Treatment

The Adult Day and Evening School is a high school-oriented program. It has an open enrollment policy which allows students to enter and leave the school at any time during the school year. Placement in the reading classes is by teacher observation, student request, and general schoolwide screening with the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, Form D. Initial reading scores as measured by the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, Form D, range from 2nd grade to 11th grade, with the mean at about the 5th grade level.

The problem now facing staff at the Adult Day and Evening School was how to meet the diverse needs of these adult students. The wide range of reading levels and lack of stable attendance patterns were the main problems to be worked around, along with budget restrictions which would fund only one classroom and one teacher.

It was decided that a reading laboratory approach was the only feasible solution to this almost impossible problem. Instruction for the most part would have to be on an individualized basis. Realizing that reading skills must be developed in a systemmatic way, giving opportunity for the student to be approached at their independent level, materials were chosen which provided for instruction, practice, reinforcement and application, particularly of the comprehension and organizational skills which these adult students lacked. Materials were chosen carefully to provide a program which would permit entry at the level of need, and which would provide for a correlated multimedia approach to allow for different learning styles. It was also important that the components be sequential and intercorrelated. For the most part, the materials chosen were those published by Instructional/Communications, Inc. for their Basic and Advanced Reading, Listening, Learning Systems.

Reading classes were held in the laboratory five days a week. Each class was in session for a one hour and fifty minute period. Three classes were held each day. Within each class, personalized instruction was given through diagnosis and prescription of each individual's needs. Instruction was generally individualized, but sometimes given in large or small groups to accommodate various learning styles and capabilities. The student was given a schedule of activities to be completed at his independent reading level, considering his learning style and areas of weakness. For a period of time each day, the class met together to consider an organizational strategy that would be helpful to all, such as finding the main idea, relating details, comparison/contrast etc.

Results

Results from the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, Forms D and E administered during the program from April 1978 to April 1979 were calculated as follows:

1. Time Period 4/78 - 6/78

   Mean 4/78 - 5.17

   Mean 6/78 - 6.51

   Statistical evidence measured by a t test indicates that the t value is 2.27. The P value is less than 0.05 indicating significance.

2. Time Period 9/78 - 11/78

   Mean 9/78 - 4.62

   Mean 11/78 - 5.59

   Statistical evidence measured by a t test indicates that the t value is 2.37. The P value is less than 0.05 indicating significance.

3. Time Period 11/78 - 1/79

   Mean 11/78 - 5.29

   Mean 1/79 - 6.07

   Statistical evidence measured by a t test indicates that the t value is 1.32. The P value did not indicate significant difference beyone the .05 level, however, the indication was that the trend was toward significance.

4. Time Period 1/79 - 4/79

   Mean 1/79 - 6.07

   Mean 4.79 - 7.11

   Statistical evidence measured by a t test

indicates that the t value is 1.32. The P value is 0.2, indicating a continued trend toward significance.

Improvement in the first two time periods was significant at the 0.05 level. Improvement continued over periods three and four, although not at the same level. It may be that the time for instruction was too short during period three, considering the intervention of the holidays. Also, during period four, there was a very difficult, disruptive student in the lab for six hours a day, and this may have been a contributing factor. This situation has been resolved, and it is hoped that, in the future, the previous results will be achieved again.

The average grade improvement for the listed students with use of the lab was 1.35 years. Most of the students were enrolled for eight weeks.

Although there are no quantitative measures, in terms of motivation, interest, and attitude, it was felt that some students made gains that can only be described as "fantastic." The following unedited, exact transcripts of students'

written comments express their overwhelmingly positive reaction to the lab and to the staff.

"I like all of the reading lab. It helps me to work faster, better and my spelling as improving." -- Dell S.

"The reading lab is where it at. I think every class shud have one althought its hard for me to get a hang of it, but its not the lab fait I take the blam myself. But I no that some day it will pay off in full." -- Milt H.

"I think the lab is the greatest reading lab going. I am learning to organize, read with understanding and learning new vocabulary words. I enjoy speed reading when using the film strip. Then answering the questions at the end of the chapter. It shows me I <u>can</u> comprehend."
--- Gladys A.

"The thing I really like about the class is the teacher take so much interest in each student understanding just what she is trying to get across. The vocabulary work has ment so much also finding main ideas." -- Fannie W.

"I think the reading lab is a wonderful program for all ages of people. This is my first time in the reading lab program. I feel that it has help me to understand better what to look for in reading. When I was younger I

didn't have the opportunity to a reading class. Now I'm takirg the advantag of this class." Dora H.

"I like the VuMate as it helps you to spell quickly. I like Listen and Reading as you listen on the tape recorder and you learn to read in book as they read and you learn to pronounce words correctly. The Tach-Mate I like as it helps you to read and spell cor-- rectly." -- Billie B.

"I think its a very nice class, because the things I do in this class helps me out a lot. Like the VuMate, Guide Reading and the rest." -- Melvin W.

"I like the reading because it help me on my spelling and I car read better and I can im- part more I hope." -- Michael J.

"The thing what the reading lab help me with was Listening and Reading. I love the Skim/Scan, Guided Reading and Tach-Mate." -- Danny T.

"I like Glass-Analysis, VuMate, tape recorder, I think these three help me to learn. And also the teacher, she the greatest." -- Willie H.

"The reading lab has improve my reading in many ways. The VuMate have done alot to make me see how the words are spelled and to spell them correct, and the glass kit has really improve me alot because the teacher helps us to sound out the words are self. Reading Around Words help me under stand the meaning of words. -- Patti D.

Implications for Teaching

1. A well-organized, sequential, intercorrelated, multimodal program of reading instruction can be effective in helping adult education students to overcome their reading deficiencies, particularly when dealing with comprehension and critical reading skills.
2. The addition of a component to the reading program which helps a student to see the author's organization and emphasize the important features, seems to be very helpful. This is especially true when the student has some background to build upon, but cannot integrate the individual parts together into a meaningful whole.

3. An individualized lab approach seems to work well with adult education students because it allows them to take responsibility for their own learning. In many cases, students in the lab "got serious" about their education for the first time in their life.
4. Success breeds motivation. When students begin to work at an independent level, they quickly have some success, often for the first time in many years. Adult education students who lack basic skills have often spent many years "covering up" that lack. Immediate success in a non-threatening situation where they are working alone can often be the first step to a more positive self image.

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